

# First rides

SWINGING A LEG OVER WHAT'S HOT THIS MONTH

## ORANGE CRUSH MX PRO LTD

£2,500 / 29-27.5in / orangebikes.com

### NEED TO KNOW

- The Crush MX is a mullet hardtail that combines the improved rollover of 29in up front with the extra strength and comfort of 27.5 Plus out back
- 6061-T6 custom butted aluminium frame comes in four sizes and is designed around a 140mm-travel fork
- LTD edition gets a brushed alloy finish and a Fox 34 Performance fork
- Shimano SLX 12-speed drivetrain and Deore two-piston brakes round out the build
- Available as a frame only for £600

### A mullet hardtail makes sense on paper but what happens when the rubber hits the trail?

If you read last month's bikes test, you'll know that I laid out my thesis for the optimum trail hardtail. For anyone that missed it, here are the Cliffs Notes.

If you are running 2.4in tyres then it's best to have 29in wheels and benefit from the improved rollover they bring. If, however, it is improved grip and comfort that you want from your cutting-edge trail hardtail, no amount of tubing manipulation will match the benefits of bigger tyres. So, I proposed that a mullet hardtail was the way to go. By having a 29in front wheel you get the steering precision you want from a regular 2.5in tyre, and you can run a shorter-travel fork to reduce the geometry variations you typically get on hardtails; making it a win, win in my book.

By switching to a 27.5in rear wheel with a 2.6in, or even a 2.8in tyre, you get extra cushioning and traction from the higher-volume rubber, but also a stronger rear wheel. No bad thing on a bike with zero rear suspension to absorb the biggest impacts. And this is where running a tyre insert like CushCore would really help too.

To put my theory to the test I started searching for mullet hardtails before I'd even finished last month's Trail hardtail test. Much to my surprise, the only one I could find was the Orange Crush MX. So, as promised, here it is.

Built around a 6061-T6 custom-butted alloy frame, the Orange Crush has always had a softer ride feel than most alloy hardtails, and the Crush S won our Hardcore Hardtail test back in 2015 with a perfect 10 rating. But as brands like Whyte made the switch to larger-volume tyres, the Crush started to slip down the ratings.

Well, it's back, and it's not just the tyre and wheel sizes that have been switched up, the geometry and sizing have been updated too. The size large boasts a generous 473mm reach, which actually increases as the fork sags into its travel, so it's going to feel slightly longer than a full-suspension bike with the same static reach measurement. Standover clearance is equally generous, so the bike never feels like a handful even though the 1,243mm wheelbase gives it a footprint that's every bit as imposing as a modern full-suspension bike.

It's slack, too; the sub-64° head angle a good match for the 140mm-travel Fox 34 fork. It's great that Orange hasn't gone crazy steep on the seat tube, so more of your weight goes into flexing it rather than trying to compress it. This makes complete sense, because with no rear suspension to sag as you climb, there's no need to have 78° seat angle on a hardtail, and I'd even argue that it actually makes the ride less forgiving.

Best of all, the BB height on the

A 27.5in wheel at the back makes perfect sense for a modern hardtail







**SPECIFICATION**

**Frame** 6061-T6 custom-butted aluminium  
**Fork** Fox 34 Performance Grip, 140mm travel  
**Wheels** Strange 110/148mm hubs, WTB ST Light i30 rims, Maxxis Minion DHF 29x2.5in/Rekon 27.5x2.6in tyres  
**Drivetrain** Race Face Ride 32t, 170mm chainset, Shimano SLX r-mech and shifter  
**Brakes** Shimano Deore two-piston, 203/180mm  
**Components** Burgtec RideWide Enduro DB 800mm bar, Burgtec Enduro 42.5mm stem, SDG Tellis 150mm post, WTB Silverado Comp saddle  
**Sizes** S, M, L, XL  
**Weight** 13.99kg (30.84lb)

**GEOMETRY**

**Size ridden** L  
**Rider height** 5ft 11in  
**Head angle** 63.9°  
**Seat angle** 75.1°  
**Effective SA** 75.1°  
**BB height** 297mm  
**Chainstay** 428mm  
**Front centre** 815mm  
**Wheelbase** 1,243mm  
**Down tube** 765mm  
**Top tube** 644mm  
**Reach** 473mm

**1ST IMPRESSION**

- HIGHS**  
 Great overall feel to the ride that inspires you to charge hard, take chances and have a total blast doing so.
- LOWS**  
 Needs a regular headset top-cap and a tougher-casing rear tyre.

Alan Muldoon

**The riding position is great for big days in the saddle**

Orange Crush MX sneaks in under 300mm, something that none of the bikes in last month's test managed. Yes, even with 170mm cranks, I clipped the pedals a couple of times, but no more than I would when riding the same trails on a regular full-suspension bike.

So the frame is dialled, but what about the build kit? For a £2.5k bike there's nothing fancy but it's all functional. I think it's cool too, that there's not a single carbon component to be found. The alloy Burgtec RideWide Enduro bar has a great profile, as does the classic WTB Silverado saddle. Orange mixes a Race Face Ride chainset with a 12-speed Shimano SLX drivetrain to great effect and while the two-piston

Deore brakes have slightly less power than Shimano's four-piston units, they have better modulation and don't seem to be plagued by the brand's variable bite point problem. Which, I have to say, is a bugbear of mine.

**HOW IT RIDES**

I was super-excited when the Orange Crush MX arrived. Sure, it had a slightly longer-travel fork than the ideal trail hardtail I'd outlined last month, and I'd have liked the 2.6in Maxxis Rekon rear tyre in the tougher EXO+ casing, but it was close enough, and I was more interested in the concept of a mullet hardtail and didn't want to get distracted by minor details.

It's somewhat ironic then, that a component part as small and insignificant as the upper headset bearing cover almost proved the undoing of this bike. The 10mm conical bearing cover prevented me from getting the handlebar low enough to properly weight the front end. Now, it's worth pointing out that if I'd been

on the size medium, this wouldn't have been an issue, as the head tube is 10mm shorter.

So my first ride on the MX left me feeling a little deflated. I promptly ditched the bearing cover and slammed the stem, which instantly had me power wheelieing out of corners rather than hanging off the back of the bike. The lower bar position allowed me to pull up harder on the bar when sprinting, while offering an altogether more centered riding position for hard charging.

The Crush MX isn't only for the hardcore trail rider though. The overall riding position is great for big days in the saddle, and that's where the 2.6in rear tyre really comes into its own. Not only is it more comfortable, the tyre's ability to wrap around rather than ping off roots and rocks, really increases traction, be it climbing or braking. Sure, the low-profile tread on the Rekon lacks bite, but it keeps the tempo and efficiency high, which is exactly what you want from a hardtail.

Up front, the 140mm Fox 34 fork is



Two-piston Deore brakes sacrifice power for reliability of action